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FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
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RUEHAM/AMEMBASSY AMMAN 1725
RUEHBL/AMEMBASSY BEIRUT 2158
RUEHEG/AMEMBASSY CAIRO 5064
RUEHDM/AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS 8432
RUEHJM/AMCONSUL JERUSALEM 8875
RUEHJI/AMEMBASSY JIDDA 6895
RUEHRH/USELO RIYADH 3333

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E.O. 12356: DECL: 02/09/89

TAGS: OREP (CODEL COHEN), PREL, PBTS, IS

SUBJECT: CODEL COHEN MEETING WITH PRIME MINISTER BEGIN

1. CONFIDENTIAL - ENTIRE TEXT.

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2. SUMMARY: CODEL COHEN MET WITH PRIME MINISTER BEGIN FOR FORTY MINUTES MORNING OF FEBRUARY 8. MEETING TOOK PLACE AMID WIDE PUBLICITY ABOUT THE REPORT OF THE KAHAN COMMISSION, WHICH WAS RELEASED AS THE MEETING WAS ABOUT TO BEGIN. CODEL CONCENTRATED ON LEBANON AND THE PEACE PROCESS, AND ON THE ADVICE OF THE EMBASSY, CAREFULLY AVOIDED QUESTIONS ON THE COMMISSION REPORT. THE PRIME MINISTER SEEMED INITIALLY PREOCCUPIED AND RESPONDED PERFUNCTORILY TO QUESTIONS. HOWEVER, IN THE COURSE OF THE MEETING HIS DEMEANOR IMPROVED NOTICEABLY. AT THE CLOSE OF THE MEETING, THE PRIME MINISTER, BEAMING BROADLY AND OBVIOUSLY ENJOYING THE DRAMA, COMMENTED TO THE CODEL THAT THEY HAD COME "ON A VERY INTERESTING DAY." END SUMMARY.

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3. PRIME MINISTER BEGIN MET WITH ENTIRE CODEL COHEN PARTY (18 PEOPLE) FOR FORTY MINUTES MORNING OF FEBRUARY 8. THE MEETING TOOK PLACE AT ALMOST THE SAME TIME AS THE REPORT OF THE KAHAN COMMISSION INTO THE SABRA/SHATILA MASSACRE WAS RELEASED TO THE PUBLIC, AMID KEEN PUBLIC INTEREST IN THE CONTENTS OF THE REPORT IN ISRAEL. ON OUR RECOMMENDATION, THE CODEL DID NOT RAISE THE QUESTION OF THE COMMISSION REPORT DURING THE MEETING, AND THE PRIME MINISTER DID NOT DISCUSS IT EITHER.

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4. AS HAD BEEN THE CASE THROUGHOUT THE CODEL'S VISIT, THE SUBJECTS OF LEBANON AND THE PEACE

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PROCESS DOMINATED THE DISCUSSION. WITH RESPECT TO LEBANON, THE PRIME MINISTER REITERATED ISRAEL'S DESIRE TO WITHDRAW FROM LEBANON AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. HOWEVER, HE ADDED, ISRAEL'S MAIN CONCERN IS THAT THERE BE NO MORE TERRORIST ATTACKS FROM THE NORTH. THERE MUST BE SECURITY ARRANGEMENTS, WHICH WILL HAVE TO BE NEGOTIATED. IN RESPONSE TO A QUESTION BY SENATOR HEINZ, HE REAFFIRMED ISRAEL'S INTENTION TO SEEK "FOR A CERTAIN TIME, CERTAIN POINTS" OF IDF PRESENCE IN LEBANON. HE SAID THAT ISRAEL HAS A SENSE OF THE URGENCY SURROUNDING THE LEBANON NEGOTIATIONS, BUT ADDED THAT PATIENCE IS ALSO NECESSARY. THE SITUATION IS VERY COMPLICATED, HE SAID, NOTING THAT ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS IT APPEARED THAT ISRAEL HAD HAD AN AGREEMENT WITH THE LEBANESE ON ONE POINT OR ANOTHER, BUT THE AGREEMENT HAD BEEN TRANSITORY. HE CONCLUDED BY SAYING THAT ISRAEL WANTS REAL PEACE WITH LEBANON, BUT IF IT CAN'T HAVE A PEACE TREATY, IT WANTS AT LEAST A DE FACTO PEACE AND NORMALIZATION OF RELATIONS. ISRAEL HAS PAID A GREAT PRICE FOR PEACE ON ITS NORTHERN BORDER, AND WANTS TO KEEP IT.

5. ON THE PEACE PROCESS, THE PRIME MINISTER TOLD THE CODEL THAT ISRAEL WANTS TO REOPEN TALKS AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. IT WELCOMES TALKS WITH EGYPT, THE U.S., JORDAN, AND PALESTINIAN ARABS, SO LONG AS THE LATTER ARE NOT "MEMBERS OF THE PLO OR TAKING THEIR ORDERS FROM THE PLO." HE FIRMLY REJECTED ANY POSSIBILITY OF A PALESTINIAN STATE, ADDING THAT THE HEIGHTS OF JUDEA AND SAMARIA DOMINATE THE ISRAELI COASTAL PLAIN, AND ISRAEL WILL NEVER ACCEPT AN ARMED ARAB PRESENCE THERE AGAIN. IN RESPONSE TO A QUESTION BY SENATOR WILSON, BEGIN THREW COLD WATER ON THE POSSIBILITY OF A SETTLEMENT FREEZE IF HUSSEIN ENTERS THE PEACE PROCESS. "WHY SHOULD HUSSEIN GET A GIFT FOR JOINING THE NEGOTIATIONS? SETTLEMENTS ARE PART OF OUR SECURITY ARRANGEMENTS. THIS IS A VITAL ISSUE FOR US. WHY SHOULD WE SUSPEND IT?" HE DID, HOWEVER, RECALL THAT IN THE CONTEXT OF THE CAMP DAVID ACCORDS, ISRAEL HAD AGREED TO A THREE-MONTH SETTLEMENT FREEZE.

6. SENATORS COHEN AND HEINZ ASKED THE PRIME MINISTER ABOUT ISRAEL'S REJECTION OF THE PRESIDENT'S PEACE INITIATIVE. THEY POINTED OUT THAT, WHILE THERE WERE EXDISES UNDOUBTEDLY PARTS WHICH ISRAEL FOUND OBJECTIONABLE, THE TOTAL REJECTION ON ISRAEL'S PART HAD CREATED A BAD IMPRESSION IN THE UNITED STATES, AND POSITIONS HAD HARDENED NEEDLESSLY. THE PRIME MINISTER REPLIED THAT THERE ARE NUMEROUS DEVIATIONS FROM CAMP DAVID IN THE PLAN. AS A RESULT, ISRAEL COULD NOT ACCEPT IT. HE SAID THERE ARE "LEGITIMATE DIFFERENCES OF OPINION," BETWEEN THE U.S. AND ISRAEL ON THE REAGAN INITIATIVE. THE ISSUES SHOULD BE NEGOTIATED, NOT STATED IN ADVANCE, "ESPECIALLY BY THIRD PARTIES." HE CONTINUED THAT ISRAEL SHOULD HAVE BEEN CONSULTED ON THE INITIATIVE, BUT WAS NOT. NONETHELESS, ISRAEL WANTS TO GET THE TALKS GOING AGAIN, ON THE BASIS OF CAMP DAVID. "WE HAVE AN AGREEMENT. WE WANT TO KEEP IT."

7. COMMENT: THE PRIME MINISTER GREETED THE CODEL WARMLY, ALTHOUGH HE WAS TIRED AND PREOCCUPIED IN THE EARLY PART OF THE MEETING, AND HIS INITIAL ANSWERS WERE PERFUNCTORY. AS THE MEETING CONTINUED, HOWEVER,

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HE SMILED MORE FREQUENTLY AND HIS ANSWERS WERE MORE
DETAILED. AT THE CLOSE OF THE MEETING, THE PRIME
MINISTER, GRINNING BROADLY, REMARKED TO THE GROUP
THAT THEY HAD COME "ON A VERY INTERESTING DAY."
THE REMARK, AND THE TONE IN WHICH IT WAS SAID,
SUGGESTS THAT BEGIN, WHO HAS ALWAYS RELISHED A
CHALLENGING POLITICAL CONTEST, IS RESPONDING TO
THE CHALLENGE, NOW THAT THE DOUBT ABOUT THE
KAHAN COMMISSION REPORT HAS ENDED. END COMMENT.
8. CODEL HAS NOT SEEN THIS MESSAGE. LEWIS
END OF MESSAGE

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